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The First Year of the Lenin School

J. T. Murphy

THE creation of the Lenin school was the direct sequel to the decisions of the Fifth World Congress of the Communist International made for the bolshevisation of the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries. It was intended at the time when the first plans for the school were discussed, to make of it the highest Marxian educational institution for qualified Party workers, wherein the most advanced course of study could be undertaken. The objects of the studies were defined as follows:

(1) To assist the Comintern sections in raising the qualifications of leading Party workers whose revolutionary experience must be strengthened by general theoretical Marxist-Leninist preparation on the one hand; and, on the other, by direct and active study of the organisational and political experiences of the Russian Communist Party and of the experiences and current work of the Communist Parties in the capitalist and colonial countries. To achieve this, it was arranged to cover the revolutionary experiences of European Labour in the 19th century and the general methods of struggle of the proletariat on the basis of the concrete historical situation. (This was to be studied on the basis of Marx's and Engels' works.)

(2) A general analysis of the epoch of imperialism, an outline of strategy and tactics of the international proletariat during this epoch, an analysis of the conditions and the forms of preparation for the capture of power by the proletariat in one country, and of the maintenance and further utilisation of the State power. (This was to be done primarily through a study of Lenin's works.)

(3) To study the organisational and political experiences of the Russian Communist Party in preparing for and carrying out the proletarian revolution and the utilisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the interests of the toiling masses of the Soviet Union and the victory over capitalism throughout the world. (This course was to be studied not only through examination of the literature on the subject but also through a direct participation of the students in the work of the Russian Communist Party.)

(4) The course was prepared on world economics and its different parts and particularly on the interaction of capitalist countries, of the colonies and of the proletarian U.S.S.R.

(5) There was to be a study of the strategy and tactical problems of the Comintern, the organisational and political experiences of the Communist Parties of the different countries and the criticism and generalisation of the experiences arising from the current work of the Communist International.

An Ambitious Programme

It is clear that this was a very ambitious programme. There had never been such a school in history; there had never even been such an attempt to draw together leading cadres of the working class parties of the world

with a view to an extended thorough study of the revolutionary problems of the proletariat.

Still more ambitious was the idea that such a course could be covered in a period of one year. This was clearly brought home to those in charge of the work on the arrival of the students directed to the Communist International by the parties. It was seen at once that whilst the students were politically and intellectually well developed and capable of further development, they had not sufficient theoretical education to go through such a course in one year. This was possibly due to an over-estimation of the theoretical level of the parties, but whatever the reason, the fact remains that it became necessary to alter the entire structure of the course and to arrange for a longer period of study on the part of the students in order to fulfil the purpose outlined. The difficulties which arose as a consequence should be appreciated. The school direction was called upon not only to furnish new plans and programmes of work, a new library, etc., but to make these changes simultaneously with the creation of machinery for the work.

The Language Difficulty

It must be remembered that very few of Lenin's works had been translated into other languages and that translators had to be found, not only for the printed material, but also for the everyday work of the school. Still more difficult was the task before the school in relation to the concrete practical work in the factories and with the Russian Party. Here every step was a new step. Neither the Party committees nor the factory committees had ever had the experience of foreign worker students working side by side with them, and the difficulties of the work can be appreciated when it is considered that every group had to have its interpreter.

A further difficulty must be mentioned in the organisation of the school apparatus. The fact that this school had to be run on the principle of active participation of the students in every phase of the administration and that this work also had to be done through interpreters will give some idea of the new ground that we were treading and the practical difficulties.

Other factors of a political character also had a very important bearing on the solution of the difficulties attendant upon the administration of the school. On the one hand was the school direction consisting of well equipped comrades accustomed to the discipline of the Russian Communist Party, most of whom had to approach the students through interpreters, and, on the other hand, were the students, unaccustomed to Bolshevik discipline, and revealing all the immaturities of the parties from which they had come. The seventy students presented, on a small scale, all the ideological problems of the parties that have yet to grow into real Bolshevik parties. In the heads of the students were the ghosts of the Social-Democratic past, the Social-Democratic associations with the present, the syndicalist associations, etc., whilst some parties had selected their candidates, not with a view to the training of Bolshevik leaders,

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but with a view to peace and quietness in their own ranks as a result of getting rid of some awkward leaders of a fraction.

Such were the difficulties and problems which faced the school direction as the first school year opened in May, 1926.

Method of Work

How were these difficulties overcome? First of all, a word or two on the principle governing the organisation of the work of the school. The administration sought to create a body in which both the lecturers and the students could take an active part in the organisation of the entire life of the school—its academic and general administration work. This could only be done by the creation of sections, committees and commissions. This principle has been applied to every department of activity from that of the highest committee of direction of the whole school down to every subject which came up for study. This led, of course, to the creation of numerous commissions and committees, so much so, that many of the students complained of these committees and commissions, pleading for their elimination. Naturally this provoked considerable discussion and in these discussions the students reflected the life of their parties and it was easy to see to what extent they had become accustomed to collective work and collective solution of the problems of their party life. It became a question of convincing them of the necessity for this method of organisation and proving to them through actual experience the meaning of the collective solution of the problems of the parties.

Academic Organisation

Nevertheless, there was less difficulty in relation to the solving of the academic problems by this method than to the other administrative features of school life. For the whole academic work of the school a department was organised with a central committee composed both of lecturers and students. Then for each subject undertaken in the course special commissions were selected. Each of these commissions consisted of several lecturers on the subject and a representative from each student group (these students groups are language groups—Russian, French, English and German). One of the lecturers acts as chairman of the commission and one of the students as secretary. The subject commissions discuss the various questions connected with the subject, draw up the programmes and academic plans, prepare bibliographies, arrange the method of teaching, deal with the question of academic discipline and the progress of each group. The year's academic plan covered the following subjects: Political Economy, History of the Russian Communist Party, History of the Labour Movement, Party Construction, and the Russian language. The method adopted for dealing with those subjects consists of the so-called "laboratory method" though not always very strictly followed. Each subject was divided into a number of topics, each of which had to be studied independently by the students in the course of a certain period. The students were given a detailed plan of work on each topic with the literature to be read on it. Then, as a topic was studied, the lecturers arranged consulta-

tions for the students to clear up points. So much for the methods applied to the studies.

Subjects of Study

Now as to the subject matter that has been covered during the year. In Political Economy the first and third volumes of Marx's "Capital" have been covered almost completely. This constituted the main literature to which were added some of the important works of Lenin, Bukharin and others. The following topics have been dealt with:

1. (a) The fundamental stages of the inception and development of capitalism, capitalist economy.
 (b) The superficial character of capitalist economy.
 (c) The contradictions inherent in capitalist society.
 (d) Value as a regulator of capitalist economy.
2. The theory of labour value.
3. Money and credit.
4. Wage labour and capital.
5. Wages.
6. The regulators of production in capitalist economy and the distribution of surplus value.
7. Ground rent.
8. The theory of markets and crises.

In the history of the Labour movement there was given first a brief introduction dealing with the industrial revolution in England and the great French revolution. Then (a) the Chartist movement; (b) Utopian Socialism; (c) The origin of Marxism; (d) The 1848 Revolution in France; (e) First International; (f) Paris Commune.

In the courses on Leninism and the work of the Russian Party are being covered the following which will be developed very considerably in the second year: (1) Marxism and Leninism; (2) Conditions for the bourgeois revolution in Russia; (3) Russian Socialist Labour Party on the eve of the 1905 revolution; (4) the Party on the road to 1905; (5) the Party and the 1905 revolution; (6) the struggle of the Party during the period of reaction and the further rise of the Labour movement from 1905 to 1914; (7) the Party during the imperialist war, and (8) from the February to the October Revolution.

The study of the Party Construction course was taken up later than the other subjects. This course is so far considering the organisation structure of the Russian Communist Party, particularly its basic organs, the factory nuclei and their functions, and what is of particular importance, the system by which the Russian Communist Party directs the whole process of socialist construction in the U.S.S.R., and particularly the role of the party organs directly connected with the working masses.

The Practical Work

This theoretical work has been related to much practical work which was one of the most important features of the work of the school. There was a feeling in the ranks of the students that this practical work was unnecessary in view of the fact that most of them are responsible Party workers and have had considerable

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organisational experience. Nevertheless, experience has shown, in spite of the many disappointments which attended much of the work, that this phase of the training is exceedingly important and has fully justified all the efforts that have been made to make it a success.

The Practical Work

It was regarded as essential that the students should thoroughly understand how the Party directs the governmental and industrial apparatus of the State, understand the relations between the Party, the trade unions and the Government; the political direction of the peasantry and the petty bourgeois of the cities; the solution of the national problems, etc., and especially to utilise the experiences of the Russian Communist Party in organising the work of the masses. Naturally everything in this direction has been of an experimental character, but it is undoubtedly a fact that as a result of these experiences, much has been learned by everybody—teachers and students alike.

First of all, between April and June last year, excursions were organised to give the students a cursory idea of the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia by visiting the museums of the revolution. Then relations were established with the factory nuclei in various works and later the students were divided into groups of three or five people and sent to engage in manual work in the Orecho-Zuovo Textile Mill and the Colmna Locomotive and Car Works. In these factories, despite the fact that some of the students were not skilled in the trades and did not know the Russian language, this work gave an opportunity for direct contact with the workers and active Party members. Special lectures were arranged for the students, with the aid of interpreters, on the industrial, technical and economic conditions of the enterprises, and on the structure and functions of the Party organisations in the factory. The students attended the meetings and conferences of the departments and the factory as a whole, participating in the local organisations of the workers. Afterwards each student wrote a report of their experiences which became the subject of discussion in the school.

To this group work in the factories the students devoted about eight hours per week. With the end of the first school year a much more ambitious programme of practical work was organised to cover six weeks during the summer months. The whole of the students were divided into groups of three to five, and sent to all parts of the Soviet Union. Some to Leningrad, some to Siberia, some to Tashkent and so on. As far as possible the students chose for themselves where they wanted to go. For each group a plan of work and investigation was prepared upon which each group is expected to report on return. Some study industrialisation, others the relations with the peasantry, the role of the co-operatives, co-operative credit, etc.; others the solving of the national problems and so on according to the region selected. This plan of work has been carried out with the help of the Party committees in these regions and has proved the most successful experiment in practical work yet undertaken and has exercised a profound effect upon many of the students.

Inner School Life

In addition to the planned work outlined we must not overlook the activity of the students within the school. All the students are members of the Party and naturally have a Party organisation within the school conducting Agit-Prop work and participating in the political life of the day. For example, the students participated in the Enlarged Plenums of the E.C.C.I. and arranged Party circles for the discussion of the problems examined by the Plenum. Besides such discussions, the students participated in the celebrations—the anniversary of the November Revolution, anniversary of Lenin's death, anniversary of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, Red Army day, Paris Commune, May First, etc.

Besides this phase of work there is the organisation of the trade union committee in the school. This trade union committee deals with all the questions of the school conditions and improvement of the material and living conditions, as well as general participation in the organisational work of the school. Its object is to secure the active and creative participation of all the members of the school in the entire work of the school. This phase of the work is not yet fully completed.

The Outlook

Still bigger tasks face the school in the coming year. While the work has been proceeding a large extension to the school is being built. It will be completed and ready for occupation by November, and then the school will be able to accommodate two hundred students.

In the second year course, the centre of Party practice of the students will be shifted somewhat from the work of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union towards the Party to which they will return after the completion of their course. Of course, in giving this direction to their work, connections with the general problems of the Comintern and the life of the C.P.S.U. will be maintained.

The plan of work for the new students will cover much of the ground already indicated in our description of the first year's work, but of course, with the added advantage of the lessons derived from these experiences and the active co-operation of the students who had the first year's course.

We can declare with confidence that despite many mistakes and possibly many failures to accomplish all that was planned during the last year, the foundations of the school have been thoroughly laid. The International Leninist School has got into its stride and is on the high road to the fulfilment of its task as expressed in the decisions of the Fifth Congress of the Communist International.

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